

## The Zimbabwean Working Peoples: Between a political rock and an economic hard place

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At the summit of the African Union in Ghana in July 2007, Robert Mugabe was given a standing ovation. Later he went outside the conference to deliver a roaring anti-imperialist speech at a huge public rally. At the Nkrumah square Mugabe was hailed as one of the most steadfast revolutionary leaders in Africa. One year later, at the African Union Conference in Cairo, Egypt, Robert Mugabe was shunned by most leaders and condemned by those who opposed the authoritarian and dictatorial methods of rule. One day prior to the conference Mugabe had been sworn in as President after a non-election where he was the only candidate. This was a far cry from his initial inauguration in April 1980 when he was sworn in as Prime Minister before a throng of hundreds of thousands. Bob Marley had led the popular anti-racist and anti-imperialist forces to this celebration and had sung, *Africans a liberate Zimbabwe*. By June 2008 Robert when Mugabe was sworn in his regime had degenerated from a party associated with the legacies of Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah to an organization associated with the militarism and repression of Mobutu Sese Seko and Hastings Banda. Working peoples all across the region led and inspired by the Congress of South African Trade Unions opposed the Mugabe government and called for its isolation. Nelson Mandela was moved to declare that one was

witnessing a 'tragic failure of leadership in Zimbabwe.'

It is this failure that needs to be contextualized not simply as a Zimbabwean phenomenon, but as one of the forms and content of politics and political engagement in an era of economic depression and discredited neo-liberalism. All over the African continent the poor and oppressed have borne the brunt of the food crisis, the energy crisis, the health pandemics, and the crisis of the financial markets. This is the cataclysm that is being termed the worst capitalist crisis since the depression of the 1930's. While spokespersons for capitalism such as Alan Greenspan have noted the depth of the contradictions between capitalist wealth and the impoverishment of the peoples of the globe, the G8 discourse on increasing aid flows block serious analysis of the impact of the capitalist depression in Africa and other parts of the downtrodden world. Food riots and other forms of spontaneous expressions of resistance have been taking place in the absence of clear organizational forms to respond to this capitalist depression. It is in South Africa where the workers are organizing against the high food prices with marches.

Inside a country such as Zimbabwe the internal political contradictions and the dire economic conditions serve to compound the oppression of the Zimbabwean peoples. It is this oppression that calls for both clear analysis and action on the part of those who want support the oppressed and are not accessories to their oppression by overt and covert support for the Mugabe regime. The Zimbabwean working peoples have been well organized and it is in part the quality of their organization that exposed the Mugabe government and the ZANU-PF party. These organized workers and human rights activists exposed a clique of political careerists and militarists that represented itself as an anti-imperialist force in Africa. From among the ranks of the working peoples emerged various political organizations. The political party that emerged out of this alliance of working peoples is the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

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The MDC is only one section of the opposition to the government of Robert Mugabe which has been called illegitimate after the March 29, elections. There were organizations based on the workers themselves, organizations of small farmers, organizations of poor women, of students, of health professionals and patriotic intellectuals. Additionally, there were organizations of human rights and NGO reformers. Some of these elements were merged into a continent wide organization called the Africa Social Forum. The local formation was called the Zimbabwe Social Forum. However, the section of the opposition that had the most access to financial resources was those human rights and NGO activists who were linked to the social democratic foundations from Western Europe that are called the 'donor community.' These foundations along with the forward planners within the USA and Britain were most concerned about the potentialities of the workers in so far as in one of the strongest working class communities the electorate voted for a declared socialist in the 2002 elections. The Movement for Democratic Change had been formed as an alternative to the ruling party and since 1999 -2000 has used the elections as the main form of political engagement.

### **Imperative to study the background to the economic melt down**

The present struggles in Zimbabwe comprise a classic struggle between those steeped in the politics of thuggery and violence and those who want a new mode of politics in Zimbabwe. In our earlier study of *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation*, this author spelt out the social origins of the leaders who had emerged as the leaders of the liberation movement. Our task was to reinforce the warning of Frantz Fanon that exploitation can wear a black face as well as a white one. It is now essential that progressives go back and read the historical study by Michael West, *The Rise of an African Middle Class: Colonial Zimbabwe*. West traces the growth and tactics of an African middle class which had the unenviable task of constructing itself during the

early part of the 20th century and under white minority rule. While not directly topical to the present-day, it shows how the socialization of the same class which now occupies the government there and in many other places in and out of Africa could have affected the fate of the African masses. The bottom line was that this middle class wanted to occupy the positions of the former colonial overlords without fundamentally transforming the colonial economic relations.

Though the neo-liberal discourse on Africa seeks to suffocate those seeking to understand the political quagmire the struggles of the people have generated a rich corpus of literature on the challenges of post-liberation societies in Africa. Zimbabwean scholars who are linked to the working class movement have been most prolific in their analysis of the conditions of the people. Of these scholars, Brian Raftopoulos and Lloyd Sachikonye have been unflinching in their support for the working class forces. There are two studies worth recommending, (i) *Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post Colonial State in Zimbabwe, 1980-2000*, edited by Brian Raftopoulos; Lloyd Sachikonye, Weaver Press Harare, Zimbabwe 2001 and (ii) Lloyd M. Sachikonye, "The Situation of Commercial Farm Workers after Land Reform in Zimbabwe," *A Report for the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe*, Harare, Zimbabwe, March 2003. These studies that start from the conditions of the working people can be distinguished from the prolific writings of writers such as Martin Meredith and other journalist who write from the point of view of the concern for the former white commercial farmers. In the book, *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe*, Meredith bemoans the use of force and violence by the Mugabe regime. This book did not see the continuity between the violence of the Ian Smith regimes and the Mugabe regime.

Because of the levels of violence and oppression there are hundreds of books, articles and studies on contemporary Zimbabwe. From within the organized opposition there are different accounts

but by far the most penetrating have come from the African feminists. Women activists such as Grace Kwinjeh, Mary Ndlovu and Elinor Sisulu stand out in terms of the clarity of their writings and the focus on the need for transformative politics.

Edgar Tekere, the former Secretary General of the ruling party has written his own account of the levels of violence unleashed by the party against opponents and even against members of the party itself. The book, *Tekere: a Lifetime of Struggle* is instructive in so far as the evidence of the killings, accidents and poisoning came from an insider and not from international organs such as Human Rights Watch or the International Crisis Group.

### **Heightened interest after the June 27 elections**

The focus of the international attention on Zimbabwe after the March 29, 2008 elections brought out the depths to which the regime has sunk. Pan African platforms such as Pambazuka news sought to bring to a worldwide audience the fatal decline and the appalling rise of inhumanity in the name of anti-imperialism and revolution in Zimbabwe. Here was a government that had clearly lost the elections and spent one month before releasing the results of this election. While the ruling party was studying its options after the results showed that it had lost the parliamentary and Presidential elections there was a reign of terror unleashed by forces within the military and security apparatus. Thabo Mbeki and the South African government were shamed into admitting that there was unprecedented violence against the people. Robert Mugabe declared war against the citizens of Zimbabwe and declared that only God could remove him from office.

This defiance from the government of Mugabe was reinforced by the organization of the run off elections on June 27. The violence, intimidation, murders and kidnapping of the opposition had reached such proportions that the leader of the opposition pulled out of the elections and sought refuge in a foreign embassy. The fact that the leader

of the MDC sought refuge in the premises of the Dutch embassy and not an African legation was very problematic. However, this low point reflected in part the reality that most African governments had been willing to make excuses for the government of Zimbabwe. By the end of June the violence reached a point where the leaders of the Southern African Development Community condemned the violence and declared that there could be no free and fair elections in Zimbabwe on June 27. The fact that the Angolan government had broken with its past full support for the actions of Mugabe and the ZANU-PF was the most striking aspect of this condemnation. The Angolan/Zimbabwean alliance had been forged in the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1998-2002. In a debate between this author and Gerald Horne on Democracy Now, Horne, author of the book, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War Against Zimbabwe, 1965-1980*, reminded the audience that Swaziland was a dictatorship and was in no position to critique the conditions in Zimbabwe. This author would only add that the struggles in Zimbabwe by the working peoples was bringing attention to the struggles of working peoples all across Africa in so far as the conditions of oppression was one that faced all workers across the region. The reality that Robert Mugabe had declared war against the people meant that it was now necessary to condemn the violence and murder. Yet, in the midst of all of this there were nationalist and "anti-imperialists" in the United States who were defending the Mugabe regime. In reality these forces were now accessories to the war against the people of Zimbabwe.

### **Who are the forces in Zimbabwe?**

It is the poor in Zimbabwe who have borne the brunt of the thuggery and violence meted out by the Mugabe regime. The mass of the Zimbabwean peoples (workers, farmers, students, independent clergy, patriotic business persons, committed intelligentsia, and oppressed women) have suffered in numerous ways with the quality of the lives of the people deteriorating by geometric proportions. In 2005 when the party and government launched a

military style operation against the poor in the urban areas, it called the people, filth. Thus far the electoral struggle has been one of the main forms of contestation in Zimbabwe. It must be restated that while the regime seeks to ride on its stature as the party of liberation, it will now be necessary to go back to understand the seeds of this political retrogression within the very tactics of fighting the liberation war. Not only has the regime discredited certain forms of armed actions but the violations and killings within the liberation camps and the divisions between the liberation movements will have to be re-visited. In the past the female freedom fighters were the ones who had broken the silence on the authoritarianism and commandism within the ranks of the fighters.

In the face of the rush of Thabo Mbeki to establish a Government of National Unity, it is even more urgent to go back to this commandism and militarism to reflect on the experiences of Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU in the post independence era. After the forces of ZAPU were crushed militarily and ZAPU was humiliated, Nkomo joined a government of National Unity in 1987. Of the government of National Unity, Edgar Tekere remarked in his biography,

As it turned out, ZAPU was indeed swallowed up by ZANU, leading to an effective one party state. Nkomo agreed to compromise to such an extent because he was afraid of another Gukurahundi which would wipe out the Ndebele people completely. (p.153)

Joshua Nkomo was referring to the crimes against humanity that had been carried out in the immediate post independence period when tens of thousands were killed by the regime. Jonathan Moyo, a former spokesperson for the Mugabe regime, underlined the levels of violence that had been unleashed against Nkomo in the period 1982-85. In rebutting the claims by the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai that the 2008 elections had been the most violent Moyo maintained,

The fact that is still crying out loud in our country waiting for resolution is that the period leading to and

after the 1985 general election was the darkest in the political and electoral history of this country. The political violence, intimidation and harassment against the membership, supporters and leadership of PF Zapu that preceded and followed that election has not been equaled by anything since then.

There is nothing to be gained in political terms by counting dead bodies in order to turn that into a political manifesto. This is what the MDC Tsvangirai and its British and American supporters have been doing with the political violence that took place in Zimbabwe between April 4 and June 25.

Jonathan Moyo went on to write,

But it is a well known fact that for some 24 months before the 1985 general election, the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces had the Fifth Brigade deployed there during which some 20,000 people were massacred while many more were tortured, maimed, had their homes destroyed or their livelihood lost. All this happened when the whole country was still under the brutal Rhodesian state of emergency and communities in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces were under a dehumanising dusk to dawn curfew from 6pm to 6am.

Victims of these atrocities feel insulted and demeaned by Tsvangirai's false and politically insensitive claim that the violence that happened in the run up to the runoff is unprecedented in Zimbabwe's political and electoral history.

Jonathan Moyo was here seeking to score points against the leader of the MDC on the question of the scale of the violence in 1985 but behind these differences laid the reality of the traditions of political violence and murder in Zimbabwe. A full Truth and Reconciliation Commission is urgently needed in Zimbabwe to bring out the truth and to heal the society from the scars of these terror campaigns and mass murders that had been carried out in the name of African liberation.

Thabo Mbeki (recently deposed President of South Africa) and the African Union are working hard on a government of National Unity but such a unity government cannot go forward without the

demobilization of the military, security and intelligence forces that have unleashed terror against the people. Ibbo Mandaza, an insider within the ranks of the divided ZANU forces noted at the time of the launch of the Tekere book that militarism was endemic and central to the survival of the system. He had noted that the present political situation “reveals how that militarism of the liberation war has overflowed into the current situation where we have violence of the state.”

It is this violence of the state that undermines the present actions of the negotiators to establish a government of national unity without serious demilitarization of the society.

After nearly two months of negotiations between the Zanu-PF regime and the two factions of the MDC, on September 15, 2008, the press reported the signing of a power sharing deal between the different parties. Under this deal that had been characterized as ‘a mix of fire and water,’ the leader of the MDC Tsvangirai was to become the Prime Minister with his faction given 16 ministries while Robert Mugabe would head the National Security Council and hold on to 15 ministries. Even before the signing there had been prolonged differences and squabbles over who would control the crucial ministries of Finance, Defence and Home Affairs. But one month after the signing of the deal there had been no movement and more ominous was the reality that the President of South Africa was operating without the support of his own party in South Africa. Within a week of the signing of the power sharing deal Thabo Mbeki resigned as President of South Africa. Internal struggles within the African National Congress had weakened Mbeki to the point where he had no option but to resign. Even though Mbeki returned to Zimbabwe as a private citizen to attempt to get the new power sharing government moving during October 2008, the leadership of ZANU had become so belligerent that they withheld the passport of Tsvangirai when he had been scheduled to attend a SADC meeting in Swaziland.

Even before the fall of Mbeki and the intransigence of the ruling party there were dissident voices from inside Zimbabwe that decried the fact that “civil society’ and labor were excluded from the power sharing agreement. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions lamented the exclusion of the workers in this communiqué from their General Council Meeting,

It also noted that the process used in coming up with the deal was not all-inclusive as the civic society was not given an opportunity to participate.

The exclusion of such critical sectors as labour, and the secretive manner in which issues were discussed, do not give credence to the outcome of the deal. (<http://links.org.au/node/635>)

Other commentators argued that this was a deal between elites who wanted to stabilize the situation without a fundamental change in the political culture. These democratic forces had called the establishment of a transitional government, comprising both MDC and Zanu-PF representatives, to stabilise the country’s politics and economy and create conditions for peaceful, free and fair elections.

Brian Raftopoulos, the Zimbabwean activist referred to above, has stressed that this transitional government would not be the same as the government of national unity for which many, including Mbeki and the African Union, are advocating. He noted, “The government of national unity would be a long-term entity whereas the transitional government would remain in power only long enough to stabilise the country.”

### **Stabilizing the country for whom?**

The stabilization of the country so that the exploitation of the working people can continue without the full presence of the international media is urgent for both the present leaders of Zimbabwe and South Africa. For the one section of the ANC leadership the alliance between capitalists in Zimbabwe and South Africa can continue without the kind of scrutiny which should be brought to bear

on the working conditions for workers on the mines and farms in South Africa and Zimbabwe. For the ZANU-PF leadership the competition for resources between the top factions of the illegitimate regime is so intense that there is need for more open relations with foreign capitalists. When the German company that printed the currency for the government signaled that it was going to stop printing the paper for the currency, this was one more blow. This is despite the fact that the currency is now so devalued that Zimbabweans need trillions of dollars to buy a loaf of bread.

The two military factions of the ZANU-PF (Mnangagwa and Chiwenga on one side and Solomon Mujuru on the other) are in a death struggle not only to keep ZANU in power but to decide which faction should have access to the foreign exchange of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. Thus far, those closest to Mugabe and the Governor of the Bank, Gideon Gono are the ones with the forces with the most to lose from a government of national unity or a transitional government that would seek to demilitarize the society. Multiple reports have outlined the ways in which the Mnangagwa and Chiwenga faction have mobilized the military to enhance their personal and financial fortunes in the name of liberation.

### **Militarism and the dog eat dog struggles**

After destroying the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe in the past ten years, the top elements of ministers, civil servants, military and intelligence officials have participated in a speculative orgy and made the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange one of the most profitable for those with links to power. All of the indices of extreme economic crisis exist in Zimbabwe: more than 80 per cent unemployment, hunger, food shortages, shortages of medicinal supplies, inflation of over 230 million per cent and critical shortages of fuel, water and electricity. It is in the midst of this misery where the generals and party leaders are making huge profits from their control over the printing of money and speculating on scarce commodities. The USA and the European Union imposed limited sanctions on the leadership

but because international capitalism is no longer monolithic, the Mugabe regime has been supported by capitalists from China, Malaysia, Libya, and sections of the European Union.

British capitalists never left Zimbabwe. Standard Chartered and Barclays Bank are among the biggest British-owned banks operating inside Zimbabwe. British American Tobacco (BAT) continues with its near century old infrastructure inside of Zimbabwe and dominates what remains of the tobacco crop, while British Petroleum has a large slice of the fuel retail sector and Rio Tinto and Falgold are involved in gold mining.

The corporations with the biggest stake in Zimbabwe have been the South African mining conglomerates. Because of the degree of interpenetration of the two economies over the past century many corporations can do business inside of Zimbabwe while no longer reflecting the performances of their Zimbabwean operations on their books. One report in the *Mail and Guardian* of South Africa listed, Anglo-American Corporation, which is by far one of the most powerful transnational corporations in Southern Africa as one company planning to invest over US \$400m in the platinum mining sector. This company continues to hold large tracts of land hold interests in agro-industry and mining. South African Standard Bank, whose Zimbabwean subsidiary is Stanbic is also involved in the banking sector. Old Mutual, another major South African corporation, is involved in real estate and insurance. PPC Cement; Murray and Roberts; Truworths; Edcon, which owns the Edgars clothes retail chain is another South African companies.

Other South African companies include Hulett-Tongaat, which has a stake in Hippo Valley Sugar Estates; grocery chain Spar; and SAB Miller, which has a stake in Zimbabwe's Delta Beverages. Zimbabwe's thriving mining sector is dominated by foreign companies that include South Africa's Impala Platinum and Mzi Khumalo's Metallon Gold. While the Mugabe government has been

seizing land from commercial farmers this government has also been removing poor peasants from the land to make space for the mining companies. Metallon Gold, which owns five gold mines in the country, produced more than 50% of the country's revenue from gold production. It is not clear how much of the returns from these operations are channeled through official channels so that there are revenues for the Central Bank.

One of the byproducts of the repression in Zimbabwe has been the reality that the above named companies have been able to operate in Zimbabwe when workers did not have the protection of trade unions. As part of the crackdown on opponents of the regime the ZANU PF government has arrested and detained scores of trade union leaders. Thus in the expansion of the mining sector in the past eight years the workers in this mining sector now have even less protection than they had during the period of the anti colonial struggle. In the rush to offer new concessions to foreign mining companies who are profiting from the commodity boom, the ZANU government has trampled on the rights that the Zimbabwean workers won as a component of the independence struggle.

This alliance between Zimbabwean capitalists and South African capitalists is manifest in the support for Mugabe by elements within the ruling party in South Africa. It is this close connection between Zimbabwean capital and South African capital that partially accounted for the "quiet diplomacy" of Thabo Mbeki. The political leadership in Zimbabwe has degraded every principle of democracy, the right to collective bargaining, the rights of workers to health and safety conditions at work, the right to organize independently of employers, the right to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and freedom to participate in an open democratic political process. South African workers are defending the democratic rights of the Zimbabwean workers because they understand that ultimately they are also defending their own rights.

### **Who are the forces of the Opposition?**

Before the collapse of the financial sector within the United States and the wholesale nationalization of sectors of the banking industry, the principal spokespersons from the west had supported a settlement in Zimbabwe where neo-liberal policies would prevail. Because of the degree of the maturity of the Zimbabwean working peoples, western 'donors' had been very active within the ranks of the opposition to ensure that the primary means of political opposition to Mugabe by the workers was channeled into the MDC organization and did not develop into a more radicalized and politicized form of engagement. In its origins the MDC owes its political support to the support of the workers in the urban areas. At the outset the militancy of the workers and members of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions had defined the base of the party. From these beginnings the workers were joined by human rights groups, NGO elites and elements from the expropriated commercial farmer sector. There were therefore three identifiable factions of the MDC.

- (a) The first and most important was the workers, itinerant traders, unemployed from the townships, progressive clergy, students and progressive women.
- (b) The second represented the human rights and lawyer types, middle class professionals, NGO elites and constitutional activists who had convened the National Constitutional Assembly. And
- (c) The third faction represented elements from the commercial farmers and settler forces such as Eddie Cross, Ray Bennett and David Colart who joined the opposition to Mugabe.

It is the presence of the latter elements epitomized by the position of Eddie Cross that hindered a clear position on the land question by the Movement for Democratic Change.

For a short period Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organization of Zimbabwe represented one of the voices calling for the MDC to adopt a more radical position. Gwisai had contested the seat of the Highfield Constituency as a socialist in the ranks of the MDC and won. He was expelled from the party in 2002. From within

Zimbabwe Gwisai continued to be one voice calling for a socialist alternative for the Zimbabwean peoples.

Morgan Tsvangirai (the leader of the MDC) had survived the trade union movement in Zimbabwe to emerge as the head of the coalition of the different forces who were to form the MDC. Although his origins were with the trade union movement of Zimbabwe, the top echelons of the party were dominated by the NGO elites and those with close connection to German Social democrats. For a while Tsvangirai's leadership was threatened by a break away faction. This was the faction led by Arthur Mutambara who was even more explicit about the need for ties with South African capital and western interests. Mutambara's faction contested the 2008 elections as a separate party from the MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai.

None of the factions of the leadership of the MDC escaped the violence and brutality. Of the three factions of the original MDC, the one that faced the least brutality were the elements from the commercial and managerial classes. These were the ones with the resources to move to and fro between Zimbabwe and South Africa when the violence escalated. The ones who have faced the brunt of the brutality have been the leaders of the workers and students. These elements have been beaten, killed and the women violated. One group of independent women who had formed the Women of Zimbabwe Arise group (WOZA) faced constant harassment. Other independent women leaders such as Grace Kwinjeh and Sekai Holland were beaten and forced into exile. See the analysis of Grace Kwinjeh on her blog: <http://www.gracekwinjeh.blogspot.com/>

The constitutionalists in the MDC were slowly eclipsed in so far as the Mugabe government made it clear after the referendum in February 2000 that the ruling party would use force and would not be open to petitions and changes in the constitution.

In the past five years it is group C -- those from the former commercial farmers and merchant elements

-- that has held decisive influence over the leadership of the MDC. This group is clear that recovery in Zimbabwe is based on the massive inflow of capital from Britain and the USA. There is the mistaken belief as represented in the writings of Eddie Cross that there are resources in the West to aid Zimbabwe. This kind of thinking has not taken into account the financial crisis that has shaken western capitalism since the sub prime mortgage crisis in the West. Economic recovery in Zimbabwe will necessitate long term investments in health, education, the infrastructure and breaking down the colonial forms of accumulation in agriculture and mining. Mugabe has Africanized this structure and a government of National Unity cannot solve the economic problems.

While the MDC represents a political opposition to a Mugabe-led government, it does not represent an opposition to capitalism in Zimbabwe. In many ways the MDC represents a "return" to a junior partner-master relationship between the Zimbabwe capitalist class and international capital. The MDC's economic plan to "rebuild the economy", is based on the neo-liberal thinking of the IMF and World Bank. Such thinking would perpetuate the orientation of the Zimbabwean economy towards the interests of global markets and investors, not the needs of the Zimbabwean people. Because of the imperialist penetration of the MDC, it has emphasized electoral engagement to oppose Mugabe, so as not to oppose capitalism.

Zimbabwe's people need and deserve that the government be judged by its peers right there in the African continent and the African Union not by the world's super powers.

Africans by and large do not regard the USA as a model human rights upholder. Its own handling of elections and the right to vote, at another level, and its range of international violations, its present entanglements in the Middle East disqualify it as a champion of Zimbabweans, at this stage.

While the policy choices of Zanu-PF have clearly demonstrated an inability to help the Zimbabwean economy (her workers, farmers and students) to sustain themselves in today's global economy, the MDC does not represent a progressive alternative. The current position as articulated by the economic spokespersons of the MDC does not entail a transformation of the economy.

History has already demonstrated that the agricultural/mining model cannot support socioeconomic transformation in Zimbabwe. Progressives should note that the Zimbabwean people are between a political rock and an economic hard place between Zanu-Pf and the MDC. Mass actions such as strikes, stay aways and other forms of protest have been severely constrained by the wave of repression in Zimbabwe in the past five years. This repression intensified in 2006-2007 but did not prevent the opposition from mounting a credible electoral challenge. This yielded some benefits in the elections of March 29, 2008.

It was this election and its aftermath that exposed the reality that change in Zimbabwe will not be easy. The stalemate over the power sharing deal conceals an even sharper divide within the society over the paths forward. It should be repeated that Thabo Mbeki has called for this government to end the possibility of a Civil War in Zimbabwe. Mbeki overlooked the fact that there is already a war against the people of Zimbabwe. Secondly, and more importantly, neither Mbeki nor the African Union has spelt out whether this Government of National Unity will be different from the previous government of National Unity that swallowed up the forces of Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU. Will those who carried out the murders, violations and kidnapping in Zimbabwe be allowed to participate in the GNU? Will this be another method of granting immunity to those who have been responsible for the most outrageous brutalities against the people since the end of formal apartheid?

### **Making a break with repression and violence**

Those elements from the opposition who are interested in political power are continuing with the negotiations for a power-sharing deal for the government of National Unity. The forces from the ZANU leadership who want to break out of international isolation will also work for the GNU. However, neither of these forces is concerned about long-term transformation of the politics and a break from the militaristic traditions that have been legitimized as liberation traditions. One service that the Mugabe regime has rendered for the history of African liberation is for the next generation to critically assess the whole experience of the liberation struggle to unearth the foundations of the present repression. In order to make a break with economic repression, militarism, patriarchy, masculinist violence, rape and homophobic oppression there needs to be a new political culture in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa.

This political culture is already emerging with the fission in the MDC between those interested in power and those interested in the conditions of the workers, poor farmers, poor women, students and hawkers. Western European social democrats who have bankrolled the NGO elites and fostered a spirit of intellectual subservience and dependence among the constitutionalists are working over time to ensure that there is a settlement that can bring together one set of capitalists within ZANU with the most pro-capitalist sections of the opposition. It is the kind of unity that will not prioritize the demilitarization of the society.

In the face of the repression within Zimbabwe it is the organized workers in South Africa that have come out as the most forthright opponent of the Zimbabwe repression. COSATU have called for the isolation of the Zimbabwe government and a blockade of the country. Earlier the workers at the ports blocked an arms shipment from China that was destined to be used to repress the workers. The opposition of the workers across Southern Africa will re-ignite the cross-border alliances that had

been developed in the period of the anti-apartheid struggles. Inside South Africa itself, the struggles within the ANC has broken out into an open confrontation between populist forces and the neo-liberal forces around Thabo Mbeki. Jacob Zuma was able to ride on the populism to become the leader of the party. But Jacob Zuma cannot control this populism insofar as the economic conditions provide the incentive for independent organizing by the workers. The South African workers are being radicalized by the glaring disparities between the new black Bourgeoisie and the mass of the population. South African youths who support the Jacob Zuma faction should read the book of Edgar Tekere to learn how the militarism of former liberation leaders can turn into its opposite.

Governments of South Africa, of the USA and Britain as well as many of the leaders of the African Union are anxious to defuse what could develop into a revolutionary situation in Southern Africa. This is the situation where the political initiative is seized by COSATU inside South Africa in an alliance with workers in Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique,, Zambia and Angola seek to develop a regional alliance to combat food prices, high energy costs and the absence of expenditures on health care.

In less than one generation the anti-apartheid leaders have been discredited. Imperialism understands the force of prolonged popular struggle; hence there is urgency in reaching a deal in Zimbabwe before popular forms of protests develop across Southern Africa. More than twenty years ago peaceful protests brought down the regimes of Marcos in the Philippines and the Shah of Iran. Now, in the face of the world capitalist crisis, high energy prices, food prices and the health crisis in Africa, there is a struggle for life itself. It is this struggle that offers the potential for renewal. It is for the renewal of life, village renewal, community renewal and renewal of the confidence of the people that they can make history again.

### **Ubuntu and revolutionary possibilities**

Ubuntu and reparations anchors this renewal in so far as the poor and oppressed in the society want to be human beings. Desmond Tutu articulated the ideas of ubuntu in the period immediately following the end of apartheid but the articulators of the African Renaissance sought to redefine Ubuntu to legitimize self enrichment. The manipulation of Ubuntu by Mbeki and the capitalists should not discredit Ubuntu. Just as how the activities of George Bush and the wars in the name of god has not discredited Christianity, so progressives must distinguish between the African renaissance of Mbeki and a genuine thrust for repair and healing. Reconciliation is one important component of healing.

Ubuntu is an understanding of the shared humanity of all who live in a society. It is clearer in Zimbabwe that the local capitalists do not care about the humanity of the mass of the sufferers. This is the same for the black and white capitalists in South Africa. Ubuntu contains the seeds of revolutionary ideas if these ideas are rooted in the capacities of the people for self activity and for creative forms of struggle to move Africa to the next stage in the recovery of independence and emancipation. Here the memories of the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles provide an inspiration to remind the people that it is the organizational capabilities of the poor that will change society.

Change is not enough, however. There is need for renewal and this renewal must come with repair. The reparations movement has grown internationally. This movement has declared that apartheid, slavery and colonialism were crimes against humanity. African humanity cannot be renewed without repair. Imperialism understands the force of the claims for reparative justice. In the courts of the USA progressives from South Africa are using the legal challenges to those capitalists who cooperated with the apartheid regime to heighten the awareness of the need for reparative justice. The ANC government opposes these claims for reparations. The European Union and the USA

do not want a generalized and educated campaign for reparative justice.

This then accounts for the intensity of the expenditures among the so-called NGO's. European states will finance human rights NGO's in Africa as long as they do not raise the question of reparations. Traditional communist and socialist parties are also afraid of the reparative claims in so far as the reparations debate undermines one of the core ideas of the view that the capitalist mode of production represented a positive force in Africa.

### **Beyond elections to prolonged democratic struggles: every cook can govern**

At the age of 84 Mugabe may certainly get his wish that only God can remove him from office. Serious divisions exist within the ruling party over who will control the levers of plunder and repression. The challenge for the progressive African and for committed Zimbabwean patriots is to be able to support the short term struggles in Zimbabwe as well as the medium term struggles for profound political transformation beyond simply voting. As one Zimbabwean writer noted,

“What needs transformation are the political groupings that house our politicians and are the fertile grounds for an ideological framework that allows politics of retrogression. What also requires transformation is the economic environment that creates vast differences in resource allocation and plays into and cultivates the politics of ethnicity, gender and racial categorizations. The politics of retrogression does not define one individual; it defines the current characteristics of the post colonial African elite. That is why, in the majority of cases where there has been electoral transitioning of political power in Africa thus far, the condition of the people has not changed and the new leadership has not shown any marked changes from the actions of those they replaced.”

Recent electoral struggles in Kenya and the politics of compromise exposed the reality that while multi-partyism is essential for parliamentary democracy

and for ensuring democratic representation, its establishment as a system do not in itself ensure a New Democracy. There is no evidence from the power sharing in Kenya that there is a process underway for the creation and equitable distribution of the national wealth. A society of mass poverty, on the one hand, and massive wealth in the hands of a few, on the other, cannot develop the necessary conditions for the creation of the national wealth to its fullest potentiality, nor can it be democratic.

In contemporary Africa, where the economic depression is most deeply felt, there will be a greater reflex towards political repression by the leadership. In most parts of Africa the politics of retrogression has become the norm, and the leadership has taken – to cultural proportions – the tendency to turn their backs on the people as soon as they take office. There is a need to create new institutions to strengthen popular participation and representation. Parliamentary democracy on its own is not enough; it must be supplemented with and strengthened by other popular institutions and associations like the local governments, cooperative movements, independent workers, women, student and youth organizations, assemblies or organizations for the environmental concerns and for minority rights, and so forth. A new leadership must ensure that this is the dominant political culture, with enough flexibility to allow for changes when changes are needed to strengthen and further consolidate that culture.

This new political culture will eventually shift power from the current corrupt and unrepresentative political groupings, to local communities whose chosen representatives will be accountable to the interests of these local communities first not those of a small center that monopolizes power in the national political groupings.

The interconnection between the short term struggles for democratic spaces and democratic participation will require autonomous and independent organizing among the poor to move the society from one level of politics to the next. It is this new stage of revolution that is calling for a

higher form of democratic participation than the 'low intensity democracy' that equates democracy with voting and free markets only. The new stage of the struggle in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa need activists and thinkers who will break from the old conceptions of politics in order to deepen the concepts of sharing and cooperation that had existed before rapacious capitalism. This is the democracy that C. L. R. James wrote about in his writings on the Caribbean revolution. James had given notice to this democratic participation by distinguishing the democracy of the people's assemblies from parliaments. In the book, *Black Jacobins*, James had noted that revolution starts with the self mobilization of the people: 'but phases of a revolution are not decided in parliaments, they are only registered there.' (Page 81)

Thus it is necessary to reassert that while representative democratic participation and electoral struggles are important aspects of politics in Zimbabwe, the experiences of the opposition in the attempts to remove the Mugabe government should reinforce the reality that the central aspect of change is not in the contest for positions. It is not a democracy based on power sharing but a new democracy, a democracy where every cook can govern. This is how C. L. R James outlined this new democracy.

The over-riding idea was to organize the mass of the people not just to vote, but to govern. To govern through organs in village and town. To govern through Councils on Trade and Foreign policy, which would bring business, unions and the people to discuss the initiatives their Parliamentary leaders were pursuing, or to propose new initiatives. To govern by way of over-sight committees in every Ministry. That way for sure, government would be of the people. By the people could come later when the people in councils, in their own self-movement, would take back from the State, the remaining power vested in the State. And then proceed to a new and unparalleled democracy which would make even ancient Greek democracy look pallid by comparison.

The Zimbabwean peoples are now torn between the old politics of the old state power and the

possibilities of a higher form of political engagement where the people, through their own movements, learn the rules of politics not just to vote but to govern. For the moment the poor have thrown their support behind the MDC. This support will be squandered if the poor are not vigilant to ensure that their struggles against Mugabe do not end with an alliance between the reform elements of ZANU and the MDC without the working class base. While these negotiations are being orchestrated Africans in the Diaspora and progressives everywhere must engage the struggles in Zimbabwe in a way that will strengthen the cause of reparations, peace and justice in all parts of the world.